

**THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY
5 WASHINGTON STREET
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY**

**MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
MARCH 26, 2025, 5:00 P.M.**

MEMBERS:

Lauren Wells	Co-President/Chair (until 6:00 p.m.)
Rosemary Steinbaum	Vice-President/Chair
Havier Nazario	Secretary
Robert J. Austin II	Trustee
Sharnee Brown	Trustee
Miguel Rodriguez	Trustee

STAFF:

Christian Zabriskie	Director
George Williams	Assistant Director, Capital Planning

GUESTS:

Nina Safane	Executive Director, Libraries Without Borders U.S. (until 5:45 p.m.)
-------------	--

ABSENT:

Aisha Cooper	Co-President
Jason Ballard	Treasurer

Minutes prepared from a recording by Shazia Ahmad of Minutes Solutions Inc.

1. CALL TO ORDER

There being a quorum present, and the Trustees having been given adequate and proper notice of the meeting, the meeting was called to order at 5:00 [SA1]p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

On a motion duly made, it was resolved to approve the Public Session Board of Trustees minutes of January 22, 2025. Motion carried. [SA2]

3. DIRECTOR'S REPORT [SA3]

C. Zabriskie introduced N. Safane of Libraries Without Borders for the presentation to the Board.

4. LIBRARIES WITHOUT BORDERS PRESENTATION

N. Safane from Libraries Without Borders U.S. gave a brief overview of the recently completed assessment, including the data collection process and findings. The components of the data assessment include the methodology, landscape analysis in the context of geographical location, internal library review, and the next steps for the strategic plan.

Primary research tools included a community survey offered in several languages, a staff survey, library stakeholder interviews, and community leader interviews. Secondary research included an analysis of demographics, and library communications and policies, and a comparison of library usage across New Jersey and the United States. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to undertake a more robust analysis.

The landscape analysis revealed a positive perception of the Newark Public Library (NPL) yet a comparatively low rate of library usage. There are many registered users, and yet, the number of visits and circulation is lower compared to other libraries in New Jersey.

The internal library assessment included partnerships with community organizations, library promotion, offerings, and policies. Findings show that other organizations are keen to collaborate with the NPL and that it is viewed as an anchor institution. However, existing partnerships are informal and do not have clear goals. The strategic plan should prioritize implementing a tracking tool that would allow staff to monitor current collaborations and identify potential partnerships. This tool would help branches select the partnerships best suited to their communities' needs.

NPL also has an inconsistent and disjointed promotional structure, including 16 social media accounts. NPL would benefit from a well-structured promotional policy through staff training and other support, as explained in the Libraries Without Borders report. NPL has a wide range of important offerings through its collection, yet usage and circulation are lower compared to other libraries state-wide and nationwide.

NPL's existing policies are difficult to locate and, in some cases, outdated or incomplete, resulting in system inefficiencies. This has led to branches working autonomously. Libraries Without Borders has created a policy auditing tool for implementation.

The next steps in this process are in the creation of NPL's strategic plan. This plan should include defining success for the library, stating clear goals and performance indicators, and a transparent evaluation and accountability process. N. Safane emphasized that a good strategic plan is essential to realizing NPL's aspirations.

The floor was opened to questions.

L. Wells noted that Libraries Without Borders' recommendations appear to be different from the NPL's existing vision. N. Safane responded that NPL's vision of success is something to be defined by its Board, staff and stakeholders, in addition to any other interest groups. For example, many stakeholders see NPL as a community hub, but the library's existing vision and mission statement do not currently fulfill this potential. L. Wells followed up to ask about developing a vision for the library, including the process for undertaking this. N. Safane responded that NPL is already considered an anchor institution in Newark and the next step is for the library to fulfill this expectation. This includes taking into account the character of Newark, NPL's own history and character, and the unique elements that make NPL the institution that it is. There are keywords in NPL's existing vision which require more clarification and depth.

L. Wells asked for further clarification about branches acting autonomously by default. N. Safane responded that the branches are responding to community needs but that systems and tools would help facilitate this process. For example, NPL has 16 social media accounts and would benefit from centralization. As these accounts are disparate, they function autonomously.

H. Nazario agreed that resources are required to help branches operate autonomously by design and that there has been feedback on this issue. He asked for clarification with regard

to registered users, yearly attendance, and circulation in Newark compared to the state and nationwide statistics. N. Safane responded that registered users are the number of patrons with library cards, while yearly attendance pertains to the number of people coming into the library. She noted that NPL self-reported these statistics. Libraries use different tools to count the number of visitors. C. Zabriskie clarified that NPL attendance is based on the number of people attending and registered for various programs. A registered user is based on the Institute of Museum and Library Services' data, which compares the population of Newark to the number of current users with library cards. Circulation pertains to materials going out and coming back into the library. NPL does not use door counters at this time. H. Nazario agreed that NPL needs to measure this data in such a way that it assists with planning and that branches are staffed accordingly.

L. Wells noted the discrepancy between the perception of NPL and its actual usage statistics. H. Nazario also highlighted people attending the library for specific programs, and these numbers are counted as part of overall attendance. If there is more attendance due to specific programming, this may indicate the need to formulate more programming around research and learning. N. Safane agreed with these points and underlined that the Libraries Without Borders' report is a starting point for more in-depth conversations.

L. Wells inquired about the strategic planning process and how it should move forward. N. Safane responded that forming a strategic planning committee to oversee this process would be the next step and that this body could include members of the Board and staff, in addition to external community members. Community organization leaders and members have communicated their wish to be engaged with NPL. The strategic planning process would be a feasible and beneficial way to keep them involved.

S. Brown thanked N. Safane and Libraries Without Borders for the presentation and emphasized the importance of best practices as NPL moves forward with strategic planning.

L. Wells asked about integrating or overlapping the strategic planning process and the planning process for a new branch going forward. N. Safane responded that this integration provides the perfect opportunity to implement pilot programs and initiatives that would benefit the NPL system as a whole. The new branch could act as the test case for any system-wide changes.

There were no further questions. The Board and C. Zabriskie thanked N. Safane.

5. TREASURER'S REPORT

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by H. Nazario, it was resolved to approve bill sheet 1356 for January, 2025, in the amount of \$2,612,868.80, and bill sheet 1357 for February, 2025, in the amount of \$2,059,628.49. Motion carried.

R. Steinbaum reported that there was a lower cash balance at the end of February 2025 due to disbursements for insurance in the amount of approximately \$150,000. There were also continuing capital expenditures in the amount of approximately \$143,000 for the Hispanic Research and Information Center (HRIC). There was also a transfer in the amount of \$198,000 to the Community Foundation of New Jersey. R. Steinbaum noted that there is an expected forthcoming decrease in the cash balance during the second quarter due to capital expenditures at the Springfield branch. She highlighted that there would be adequate funds available for these expenditures.

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS

6.1 Development Committee

R. Steinbaum presented the development committee report. She recommended that the Board read the action items in the report, included in the meeting package, as they summarize the committee's work at this time.

6.2 Facilities Committee

ACTION – C. Zabriskie will send the Board the shared drive location hosting the mixed-use development documents.

ACTION – The facilities committee will present more comprehensive information on the forthcoming mixed-use development joint venture agreement at its next committee meeting.

ACTION – The facilities committee will share the framework, in addition to draft documents, being used to guide the mixed-use development joint venture agreement process as soon as possible with the Board.

C. Zabriskie highlighted that the VTC, the tech classroom, and the special services room have opened, and they are working well. The HRIC project continues, and the space is now furnished. Signage, lighting, and fixtures will be completed shortly, and the soft opening is tentatively scheduled for the summer. There will be an official opening in September, 2025. There is a pressing problem with the roof in the Van Buren branch.

G. Williams provided the Board with an update on the Clinton mixed-use development project. He noted the completion of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) grant for community engagement. He commended the project partners for their participation and recognized them before the Board:

- Clinton Hill Action
- Pleasant Grove Baptist Church
- Community-Minded Developers
- Thriven Design
- Annum Architects
- The Clinton Hill community

G. Williams shared a map of proposed mixed-use development project lots with the Board, in addition to residential floor plans. He also reminded the Board about the knowledge exchange with a similar project in Boston and noted that those meetings had gone well. There were also community engagement events, including the bus tour of Brooklyn to visit the Brooklyn Heights and Sunset Park mixed development projects. C. Zabriskie also organized a tour of the Brooklyn Heights Public Library. There were also community workshops, including one for youth.

G. Williams discussed the next steps for the project, including the joint venture agreement currently being drawn up by legal counsel. The full site plan and attendant application to the Newark Planning Board will be completed by June, 2025.

C. Zabriskie thanked G. Williams for his presentation and the community partners for attending the Board meeting. R. Steinbaum also conveyed the Board's thanks.

The floor was opened to questions.

R. Steinbaum asked for the shared drive location hosting the mixed-use development documents. C. Zabriskie asked about having a larger conversation around what a public library can do.

R. Steinbaum asked if the letter of intent for property not owned by NPL has to be filed. G. Williams responded that this is the case. H. Nazario noted that he has been asking for more transparency with regard to the mixed-use development project and that the Board must remain informed. He commented about the forthcoming joint venture agreement, to be presented at the May, 2025 Board meeting, and asked for more transparency and clarity as the Board is not aware of the agreement parameters. He noted that the Board had been asking for further transparency prior to the community engagement sessions. C. Zabriskie and G. Williams have been meeting with legal counsel about the joint venture agreement.

R. Austin thanked G. Williams and the community organizations for their work and asked that in-progress steps include dates so that the discussions are not repeated at various Board meetings. He also asked about one of the library buildings and its contents, as well as the possibility of auctioning items from that library. C. Zabriskie responded that he did not have an inventory of items in that location at this time, but he would be doing a walkthrough in the coming weeks.

M. Rodriguez asked G. Williams if the plan is to present the architectural drawings at the next Board meeting. G. Williams responded no, as the work is still ongoing. M. Rodriguez recommended that community organization members attend the Board meetings where the project will be presented.

S. Brown noted that mixed-use development projects are quite popular and are interested in more information and best practices for the Clinton Hill project. G. Williams provided some further information about the project and C. Zabriskie noted that the community engagement with students had been very successful. S. Brown asked how defunding and other government cuts would affect development projects. She emphasized the importance of seeing projects to completion.

There were no further questions.

6.3 Finance Committee

R. Steinbaum presented the finance committee report and noted that the committee, J. Ballard and C. Zabriskie, met with Interim Comptroller S. Little on March 20, 2025, to review the January and February, 2025 financial reports.

The consolidated summary results for the first part of 2025 showed income being slightly unfavorable compared to the budget, although this is to be expected due to capital project expenditures. The \$198,000 transfer to the Community Foundation of New Jersey will not impact operations.

6.4 Personnel and Policy Committee Report

H. Nazario noted that the committee had discussed the City of Newark's new medical plan, including the City's webinar with regard to plan offerings for employees. There will be a special enrolment session held in May or June, 2025.

C. Zabriskie and the HR team have restarted monthly labor management meetings between Council 63 and Local 2298 to improve communications and address concerns. There will be monthly meetings between C. Zabriskie and the HR team with representatives from IUOE Local 68. Their first meeting is scheduled for March 31, 2025.

National Library Week, an annual celebration, will be held from August 6-12, 2025. NPL will host an all-staff breakfast on April 11, 2025 to discuss future projects and reiterate the value of employees. Each staff member will also receive a company gift.

On April 15, 2025, NPL will celebrate A. Webb, the Executive Assistant to Director C. Zabriskie, at a retirement luncheon to be held at noon on the 4th floor. The Board was invited to join the luncheon.

The floor was opened to questions. R. Austin asked if there is a cost to attend the retirement luncheon and C. Zabriskie confirmed that there is not.

There were no further questions.

7. NEW BUSINESS

7.1 Strategic Planning RFP

ACTION – C. Zabriskie will make the Libraries Without Borders' assessment report available on the NPL web site for the RFP process.

C. Zabriskie asked if there was any feedback for the strategic planning RFP submitted to the Board. He noted that he would include the Board's feedback when submitting the RFP. H. Nazario noted that NPL's strategic plan should be guided by the Libraries Without Borders' assessment and that this should be included in the RFP.

R. Steinbaum noted that the letterhead for the RFP should state that L. Wells and A. Cooper are co-President. She noted that A. Cooper's name should have Esq. next to it. Also, she asked that the statement in the RFP letter about conducting a far-reaching assessment be removed. Libraries Without Borders has already conducted this assessment. She also asked that biographies for the people conducting the work be included in the letter.

R. Austin asked about the dates in the document, and C. Zabriskie confirmed that these have been changed. He also asked that Esq. be added to A. Cooper's name in the agenda documents.

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The floor was opened to public comments.

B. Cohen, president of Local 2298 at the Newark Public Library, spoke to the Board and noted that attendance and circulation statistics are collected. She also noted that she and the members hope to have a new contract in place and noted that negotiations are ongoing.

R. Austin responded that B. Cohen is always welcome to speak during the Board's public comments, as her feedback is appreciated.

There were no further public comments.

9. RESOLUTION TO MOVE INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion made by R. Austin, seconded by M. Rodriguez, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees move into the Executive Session. Motion carried.

10. **RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION**

On a motion made by H. Nazario, seconded by M. Rodriguez, it was resolved that the Newark Public Library Board of Trustees reconvene in the Public Session. Motion carried.

11. **EXECUTIVE SESSION MOTION**

On a motion made by R. Steinbaum, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to authorize Newark Public Library's attorneys to enter into a settlement conversation with the AUSA up to the amount of the original loan and urge them to seek an extended repayment schedule. Motion carried.

12. **HR RESOLUTION**

On a motion made by H. Nazario, seconded by R. Austin, it was resolved to approve the first four items in the personnel resolution for the Newark Public Library Board meeting held on March 26, 2025. Motion carried.

13. **NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next Board of Trustees meeting is May 28, 2025.

14. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion duly made and carried, it was resolved to adjourn the meeting at 8:06 p.m.

DISCLAIMER

The above document should be used as a summary of the motions passed and issues discussed at the meeting. This document shall not be considered a verbatim copy of every word spoken at the meeting.

Lauren Wells, President

Christian Zabriskie, Director

Date

Date